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Reproduction of Pieter Brueghel's engraving 'Spring' (1565), showing the cradle scythe which came into use in the 12th or 13th century. While greatly increasing productivity per man, it also increased shattering losses as much as twice those incurred in traditional sickle reaping. (See 'The Grain Harvesters' by Graeme Quick and Wesley Buchele.)

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Pieter Brueghel the Elder, or as he is sometimes known, Peasant Brueghel, is generally regarded as one of the greatest artists of all time. Connoisseurs say of him that his art belongs both to the past and the present. *The Hay Harvest* reminds us, among many other things, that modern agriculture has made a major contribution to women's liberation.

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Shortly before his death, Peter Brueghel the Elder set himself to represent the seasons of the year in six great paintings. Unfortunately, only five survive. *The Corn Harvest* depicts full summer and conveys an impression of heat and fatigue. Unlike *The Hay Harvest*, with its mood of gaiety and active involvement by both sexes, only one female figure is at work here and she is engaged in the less arduous task of tying sheaves; the others are content to participate in lunch.

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